



# THE THIRST TO GET IT THERE FIRST

By DOUGLAS FAULKNER

**I**N QUEBEC, *Pepsi* is king. "I think it is a fact that *Pepsi* does better in Eastern Canada," notes Glynn Williams, vice-president and director of Toronto-based Newcrest Capital, which, amongst other things, monitors the soft-drink industry across Canada. Adds Williams: "People develop a brand loyalty and they end up developing an allegiance to one particular brand, which is what we see with *Pepsi* in Quebec and *Coca-Cola* in Western Canada." According to industry observers, *Pepsi* continues to be the preferred soft drink in most cities and towns throughout a province that has long been an important flavored soft-drink market.

Sales dollars reached \$333,641,695 (A.C. Nielsen Canada) for a 52-week period ending this past August 17. Analysts cite two critical elements which have contributed to the company's entrenched position in Quebec: its effective marketing efforts along with the strong support Pepsi-Cola Canada Beverages receives from its local bottlers as well.

For the soft-drink producers, price and product freshness are paramount when courting purchasers who have redefined the term—brand loyalty. "For us, getting the right product to the right store at the right time is extremely important given how extremely competitive it is out there," remarks Normand Prud'homme, maintenance manager, at Pepsi-Cola Beverages Canada's plant in St-Laurent. "The stores have certain expectations and so do the consumers. We are doing everything possible to ensure that there is no damage to the packages as they leave the plant and while they are en route to the stores."

Playing an important role in the material-handling function at the west-end Montreal plant has been the addition of two stretchwrappers, manufactured and installed by Wulftec International, of Ayer's Cliff, based in Quebec's Eastern Townships. Both machines are Wulftec's popular WCRT-200 models—the first unit was installed in April and it has a top-board dispenser. This wrapper is stationed at the back-end of the plant's very busy Line 2, which fills and caps 1- and 2L PET containers, made by Twinpak Inc., in nearby Dorval.

The second Wulftec unit is located in the warehouse and it arrived this past July. The stretchwrapper is equipped with a chain conveyor, built precisely to the specifications of the St-Laurent plant engineers. "This specific conveyor is very strong and very sturdy and it has to be," notes Prud'homme. "Sometimes the forklift drivers are in a hurry and they bump (with their lift) the area where the pallet sits after it has been stretchwrapped. We didn't want the pallet to be disrupted. What we got was what we wanted: a very solid conveyor." Prud'homme also prefers a chain conveyor because it

**RECENTLY INSTALLED STRETCHWRAPPERS  
ENSURE THAT MONTREAL PEPSI PLANT GETS  
THE RIGHT PRODUCT TO THE RIGHT PLACE  
ON TIME—EVERY TIME**



Top: Pepsi's Normand Prud'homme stationed by stretch-wrapped loads of soft drink. Above: Wulftec unit at work.

requires less maintenance than a roller conveyor, and he believes roller conveyors can be more easily damaged.

Two factors figured heavily in the plant management team's decision to opt for the Wulftec stretchwrappers. Price, of course, was a serious consideration, notes Prud'homme. The second important element was the plant's success with a Wulftec unit purchased in 1991. That stretchwrapper was among the first manufactured and sold by Wulftec founder Wolfgang Geisinger, whose company, in recent times, has installed many stretchwrappers in Pepsi plants throughout North America.

"These machines (Model WCRT-200s) are heavy-duty machines and they are solidly built," says Prud'homme. "The engineering is very good and I feel they didn't try to cut corners when they made them. Basically, the machines have everything we needed, and the controls are very good." The PLCs and the sensors are made by Allen-Bradley.

Employing a spiral wrapping method, the Model WCRT-200s feature a rotating arm which rotates the roll of film as it moves up and down the mast of the machine, wrapping the pallet load from bottom to top and back to the bottom again. These machines enable

the operator to program the number of film layers to be applied to the top and the bottom of each pallet load. The resulting selective distribution of film protects the areas of greatest load stress. At the St-Laurent plant, wrapping speeds often exceed 55 pallets per hour. Once wrapped, a clamp holds the Huntsman-made film while a heat bar cuts across the film, joined to the wrapped pallet. As the pallet moves forward, a thin brush brushes the cut film to the pallet's side. The pallet is then conveyed to the exit conveyor, awaiting the lift truck pick up.

In addition to the new Wulftec stretchwrappers, the material-handling also added this year a Production Automation palletizer, built in Montgomery, Ala. A similar Production Automation (PAI) machine was installed in 1994. Successive layers of PET containers are placed on Canadian Pallet Council-approved pallets before they travel on conveyor to the pallet wrapping stations.

The St-Laurent plant, which was built by 7-Up before the company was purchased by Pepsi-Cola in 1984, is one of the busiest Pepsi manufacturing and packaging facilities in all of North America. This year, more than 21-million cases of soft drinks are expected to pass through the plant's doors with over half the packaging in cans and virtually the rest in PET containers. The facility, with one can line and two PET lines, also has a glass bottling line which operates rather infrequently because of waning consumer interest. Beverages packaged in glass bottles are sent to Ontario as well.

The St-Laurent plant's packaging lines feature a mix of veteran and relatively new machines to serve a Quebec market which saw the combined sales volume (measured in imperial gallons) for all the province's soft-drink producers exceed 92.3-million in the past year. For beverage plants like *Pepsi's* St-Laurent facility, maintaining and even increasing market share comes down to the ability of packaging operations to be able to respond to the market's needs almost instantaneously. At the St-Laurent plant, reliable stretchwrappers are playing an important part in ensuring that objective is being met—every day. □